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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of Tidewater Community College's (Virginia) 1998 employer survey study, which provides useful insights into graduates' skills, professional behaviors, and overall job performance. Employer comments also provide valuable feedback relating to currency and comprehensiveness of the college's programs. The study found that employers were satisfied with nine areas of knowledge and skills that were evaluated in the survey. "Thinking creatively" was rated highest, while "math skills" was rated lowest. Employers were overwhelmingly satisfied with graduates' professional behaviors. Satisfactory ratings were as follows: "cooperation" (94%), "initiative" (92%), "dependability" (97%), and "decision-making skills" (88%). Employers were asked to evaluate their overall perception of "occupational/technical training" (rated excellent or good by 79% of respondents) and "general education" (rated excellent or good by 77% of respondents). Areas most often cited by employers as "needs improvement" were "solving problems" and "decision-making skills." Eighty-nine percent of employers rated "overall job performance" of the college's graduates as either excellent or good. A large majority (94%) of employers would employ the college's graduates from the same program if appropriate positions were available. Overall, employers are satisfied with the preparation of the college's graduates in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors. Appendices include the 1998 employer survey instrument. (VWC)

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Tidewater Community College

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1998 EMPLOYER SURVEY STUDY

Office of Institutional Research

March 2000

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Tidewater Community College

1998 EMPLOYER SURVEY STUDY

Office of Institutional Research
Tidewater Community College
121 College Place
Norfolk VA 23510

March 2000

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1998 TCC Employer Survey Study
Executive Summary

During the spring of 1999, the Office of Institutional Research conducted an employer survey as a follow-up to the 1998 TCC Graduate Survey. The survey data provide useful insights into graduates' skills, professional behaviors, and overall job performance. Employer comments also provide valuable feedback relating to currency and comprehensiveness of TCC programs. Highlights of the study are provided below:

- Employers were satisfied with nine areas of knowledge and skills that were evaluated in the survey. The percentages of skills that were rated adequate or more than adequate ranged from 77% to 90%. "Thinking creatively" was rated highest, while "math skills" was rated lowest.

- Employers were overwhelmingly satisfied with graduates' professional behaviors. Satisfactory ratings were as follows: "cooperation" (94%), "initiative" (92%), "dependability" (97%), and "decision-making skills" (88%).

- Employers were asked to evaluate their overall perception of "occupational/technical training" and "general education." "General education" was rated excellent or good by 77% of the respondents, and "occupational/technical training" was rated as such by 79% of the respondents.

- Areas most often cited by employers as "needs improvement" were "solving problems" (7%) and "decision-making skills" (10%). Employers' comments cited the need for more pragmatic, hands-on experience prior to entering the workplace.

- Eighty-nine percent of employers rated "overall job performance" of TCC graduates as either excellent (59%) or good (30%). There was little difference in these ratings between graduates of college transfer programs and occupational/technical programs. Additionally, a large majority (94%) of employers would employ TCC graduates from the same program if appropriate positions were available.

- Overall, employers are satisfied with the preparation of the TCC graduates in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors. In terms of employers' needs for a skilled workforce, one respondent summarized as follows:" Most employers want people who can make a decision, whether it is right or wrong, identify problems and how they affect...the overall running of the business, and develop a plan of action."

1998 Employer Survey Study

INTRODUCTION

As part of Tidewater Community College's on-going assessment of its academic programs, an employer survey is conducted biennially as a follow-up to the TCC Graduate Survey. Employer feedback is the foundation upon which academic programs, particularly those in the occupational/technical area, are gauged for currency and comprehensiveness. The most recent employer survey was conducted in spring 1999 and surveyed the employers of 1998 TCC graduates. The survey data provide useful insights into graduates' skills and professional behaviors as viewed by their employers. The survey also asks employers to rate TCC with respect to how well it provides occupational/technical training and general education programs. Finally, employers rate the overall job performance of each graduate and indicate intentions of hiring other TCC graduates from the same program.

METHODOLOGY

The employer survey sample was derived from 1998 graduate survey respondents who consented to have their employers contacted. While this process might lend itself to sample bias, the graduates' consent is necessary to ensure their right to privacy. Two hundred seventy-six graduates (52%), out of 528 graduate respondents who were employed, gave their permission for employer contact.

The survey process included two mailings, each consisting of a letter, questionnaire, and pre-paid business reply envelope. The first mailing was completed February 23, 1999, approximately ten months after graduation. The second mailing was completed March 12, 1999. Overall, 176 surveys were completed and returned, resulting in a 64% response rate.

A sample size test for validity on a finite population of 528, with a 90% confidence level and a sampling error of $\pm$ 5%, indicated a sample size of 180. Thus, the response of 176 surveys proved adequate to provide valid and reliable results. In addition, correlation analysis showed no significant bias in the sample population. It should be noted, however, that the graduates who allowed contact with their employer were more likely to be employed in a curriculum-related job.

This report analyzes the data results of the 1998 survey, and where appropriate, makes

comparisons with the 1996 study. In addition, Appendices A through D provide the survey instrument and letters, employers' suggestions for improvement in educational preparation, the 1998 employer data results by curriculum, and a listing of employer respondents by campus and curriculum.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Most graduates evaluated were female (59%), employed full-time (77%), and employed in a job directly or somewhat related to their curriculum (80%). Seventy percent of those evaluated received occupational/technical degrees or certificates upon graduation, and 30% received college transfer degrees. Overall, 40% of the graduates who were employed by the same company prior to graduation received a promotion or pay raise after graduation.

EVALUATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Employers of 1998 graduates indicated that TCC training prepared graduates either adequately, or more than adequately, in nine areas of knowledge and skills. Figure 1 shows the percentages range from 77% to 90% across the nine areas. Thinking creatively was rated the highest (90% adequate or more than adequate). Overall, there was little change from 1996. Math skills (77%) continued to be the lowest rated area, although there was slight improvement over 1996. When examined by degree type, college transfer graduates rated highest in understanding written information and speaking skills (91% and 89%, respectively). Occupational/technical graduates rated highest in thinking creatively (91%), speaking skills (89%), and solving problems (89%).

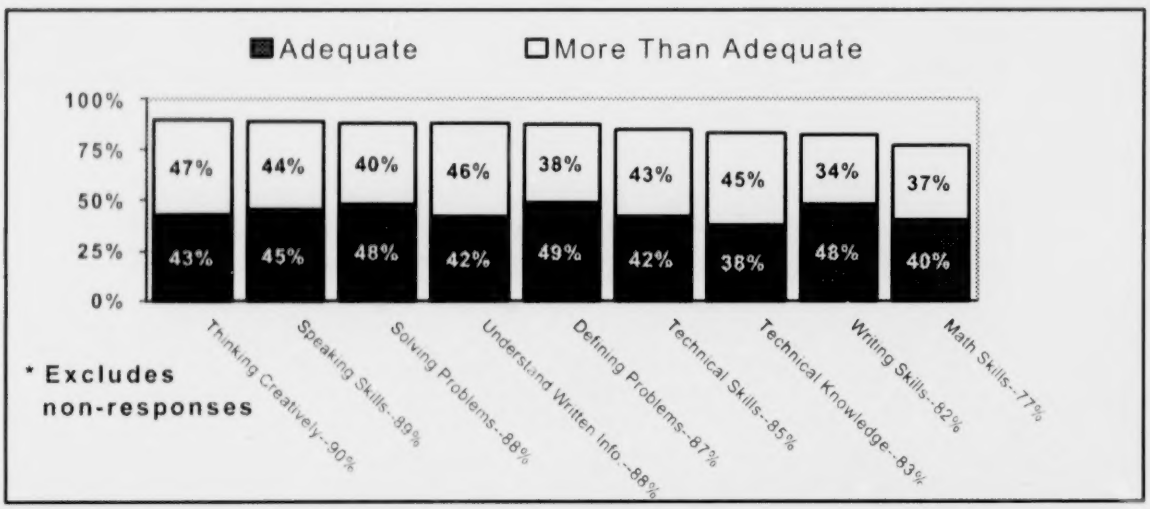

FIGURE 1 Evaluation of Knowledge and Skills -- Ratings of Adequate or More Than Adequate

No more than 7% of the employers indicated improvement was needed in any of the knowledge and skills areas. The areas most often cited for improvement were solving problems (7%), followed by technical knowledge (5%), defining problems (5%), and thinking creatively (5%). In all other areas, less than 5% of the respondents noted a need for improvement.

EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS

Employers were overwhelmingly satisfied with graduates' professional behaviors in terms of cooperation with others, initiative, dependability, and decision-making skills. Figure 2 illustrates satisfactory ratings ranging from 88% to 97% for each area mentioned above. The area most often cited for "needs improvement" was decision-making skills (10%).

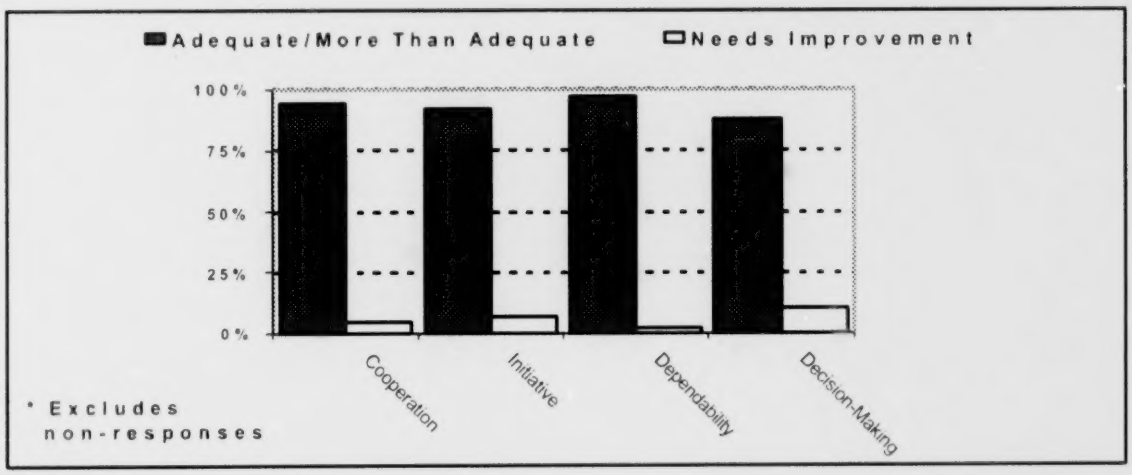

FIGURE 2 Ratings of Professional Behaviors

EVALUATION OF OCCUPATIONAL/TECHNICAL TRAINING AND GENERAL EDUCATION

In addition to evaluating job skills and professional behaviors, employers were asked to evaluate their overall perception of occupational/technical training and general education. Results are illustrated in Table 1. Occupational/technical training was rated excellent or good by 79% of the respondents (42% excellent, 37% good). General education was rated excellent or good by 77% of the respondents (37% excellent, 40% good).

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion
1998 General Education	37%	40%	8%	0%	15%
1998 O/T Training	42%	37%	5%	1%	15%

Table 1 Ratings of General Education & O/T Training

OVERALL RATINGS OF JOB PERFORMANCE

Eighty-nine percent of employers rated overall job performance of TCC graduates as either excellent (59%) or good (30%). There was very little difference in ratings between graduates of college transfer programs and occupational/ technical programs. Moreover, a large majority (94%) of employers indicated they would employ TCC graduates from the same program if appropriate positions were available.

Graduates' employers who responded they would not hire a TCC graduate represented seven different curricula; examination of employers' comments from the seven curricular areas tended to cite the need for more practical, "hands-on" experience prior to entering the workplace.

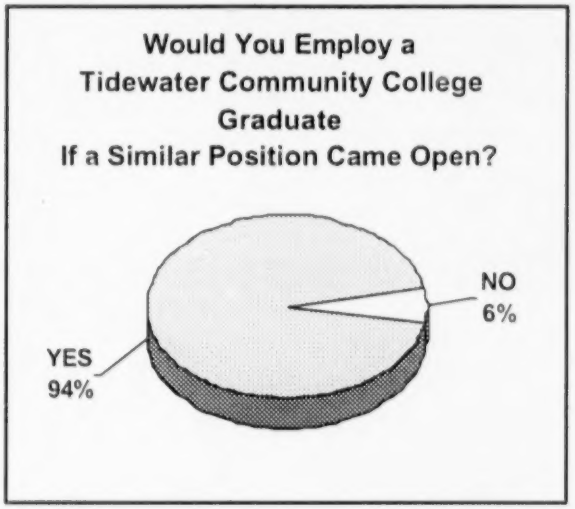

FIGURE 3 Percent of Employers Who Would Hire TCC Graduate

COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS WITH GRADUATE RATINGS

The TCC Graduate Survey asks the graduates to rate their preparation in the same knowledge and skill areas as those listed on the TCC Employer Survey. Historically, employers tend to rate knowledge and skill areas of TCC graduates higher than the graduates. Similar to the 1996 study, Figure 4 illustrates this premise for the 1998 study. The three areas with the largest disparity in the percentage of employers and graduates indicating "more than adequately prepared" are technical knowledge (23% disparity), technical skills (21% disparity), and

thinking creatively (21% disparity). In each case, the employers rated these areas twice as high as the graduates with regard to preparation. While there is no way of knowing why this disparity exists, it could be explained by a possible lack of self-confidence, together with a lack of experience, on the graduate's part.

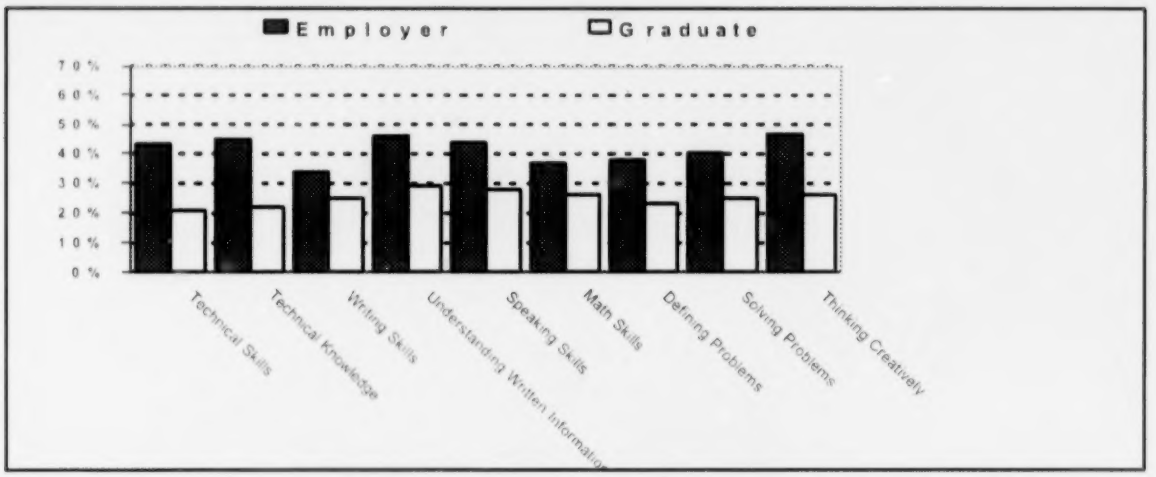

FIGURE 4 Employer and Graduate Rating Comparisons of TCC Preparation in Nine Knowledge and Skills Areas (Percentages refer to "more than adequately prepared" category)

For areas cited as "needs improvement," three areas matched evaluations by both employers and graduates: speaking skills, writing skills, and technical knowledge. Graduates were more likely to cite improvement needed in math skills and technical skills as compared to employers. Employers were more likely to cite improvement needed in solving and defining problems. Results are depicted in Figure 5.

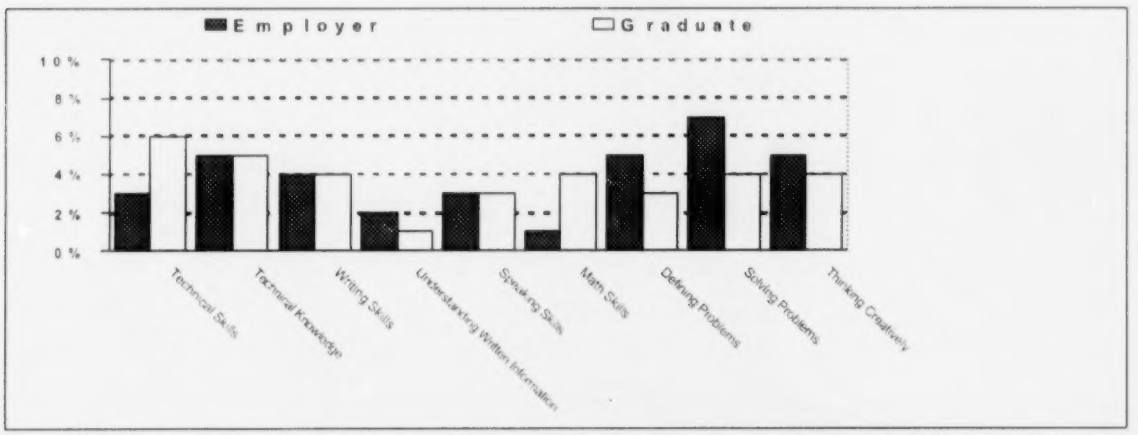

FIGURE 5 Employer and Graduate Rating Comparisons of TCC Preparation in Nine Knowledge and Skills Areas (Percentages refer to "needs improvement" category)

With respect to professional behaviors, more employers than graduates indicated improvement was needed in all four areas. According to Figure 6, the largest discrepancies occurred in the areas of decision-making skills and initiative.

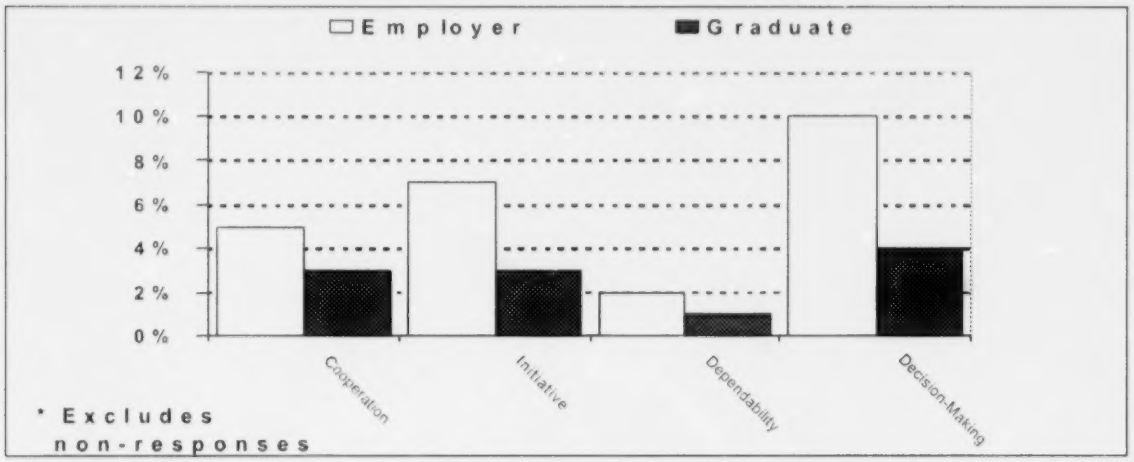

FIGURE 6 Evaluation of Professional Behaviors (Percentages refer to "needs improvement category

CONCLUSION

The TCC Employer Survey is conducted as part of the assessment and evaluation of the general education and occupational/technical training efforts of the college. As such, it is an important part of the college's overall accountability to the public at large. The results are analyzed by curriculum for program review purposes with an eye toward currency and comprehensiveness of each program. The employer survey data, in conjunction with the graduate survey data, provide a broad picture of outcomes for each academic program.

Overall, employers were satisfied with the preparation of the TCC graduates in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors. One employer stated succinctly the types of integrated knowledge and skills that employers seek in an employee: " Most employers want people who can make a decision, whether it is right or wrong, identify problems and how they affect...the overall running of the business, and develop a plan of action."

For those respondents who expressed an opinion, more than 90% of the employers rated TCC's general education and occupational/technical training components as good to excellent. Further proof of employer satisfaction is the fact that 94% of the employers indicated they would hire a TCC graduate from the same program if an appropriate position became available.

TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

District Office

March 12, 1999

«supervisor»
«employer»
«address1»
«address2»
«city»,«state» «zip»

Dear Employer:

A few weeks ago you should have received a letter asking for your cooperation in an employer follow-up survey which Tidewater Community College is conducting for 1998 graduates. The state legislature has mandated that all public institutions of higher education must implement a plan for student outcomes assessment that provides feedback for educational improvement. This survey is one component of the Tidewater Community College student outcomes assessment plan. The purpose of the survey is to assess how well the college is training and educating students and where improvements are needed.

Last fall, every 1998 June graduate of Tidewater Community College was surveyed and asked the following: 1) if the college had permission to survey their employer, and 2) their employer's name and address. Only those graduates who responded with their permission were included in the employer followup survey. At the top of the questionnaire you will find the graduate's name and major curriculum. Responses will be kept strictly confidential and data will be reported only in aggregate form.

In case you have misplaced or never received your original questionnaire, I have enclosed another questionnaire and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire and return it at your earliest convenience. Employer feedback is vital to the improvement of our educational programs.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in our survey. Your input is valued by the college faculty and staff and will provide a sound basis for future curriculum recommendations. If you should have any questions about this survey, please feel free to call me at (757) 822-1070.

Respectfully,

Lisa S. Kleiman

Lisa S. Kleiman
Director, Institutional Research

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TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

District Office

February 23, 1999

«supervisor»
«employer»
«address1»
«address2»
«city», «state» «zip»

Dear Employer:

Tidewater Community College is continually seeking to improve the programs and services offered to the citizens of the service area. As part of the college mission, Tidewater Community College offers comprehensive programs designed to meet the educational and training needs of area citizens, business, and industry. In order to assess how well the college is training and educating students, I am conducting an employer follow-up survey to gather data for improvement of college programs.

Last fall, every 1998 June graduate of Tidewater Community College was surveyed and asked the following: 1) if the college had permission to survey their employer, and 2) their employer's name and address. Only those graduates who responded with their permission were included in the employer follow-up survey. At the top of the questionnaire you will find the graduate's name and major field of study.

As an employer of a Tidewater Community College graduate, you can be a part of our program assessment by completing the enclosed questionnaire. Employer feedback can provide some of the most valuable data for curriculum reform or improvement. Please complete the questionnaire and return it at your earliest convenience. A stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of Tidewater Community College, I would like to thank you in advance for helping us make program assessment a viable part of the College's commitment to excellence in education. If you should have any questions about this survey, please feel free to call me at (757) 822-1070.

Respectfully,

Lisa S. Kleiman

Lisa S. Kleiman
Director, Institutional Research

[illegible] • Norfolk • Virginia 23510-1907
Telephone (757) 822-1[illegible] • Fax (757) 822-1080 • http://www.tcc.vccs.edu

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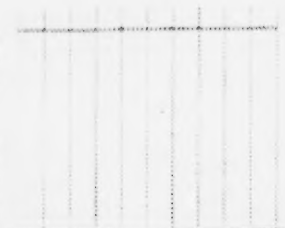

TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
1994 EMPLOYER SURVEY

(INSTRUCTIONS: For the following questions, the word "employee" refers to the above named individual. Please color in the appropriate answer with a #2, 2 lead pencil (similar to the box in upper left corner). DO NOT USE A PEN.

1. My position relative to this employee is/was: Employer
Supervisor
Other (please specify) _____

2. How adequately did the employee's TCC training prepare him/her in the following areas?

	More Than Adequate	Adequate	Needs Improvement	Not Applicable	Not Observed
a. Technical job skills					
b. Technical job related knowledge					
c. Writing skills					
d. Understanding written information					
e. Speaking skills					
f. Mathematics skills					
g. Defining problems					
h. Solving problems					
i. Thinking creatively					

If you answered "Needs Improvement" to any of the above, please explain:

_____

_____

_____

3. Please rate the employee on the following professional behaviors:

	Adequate	Needs Improvement	Not Applicable	Not Observed
a. Cooperation with others				
b. Initiative				
c. Dependability				
d. Decision-making skills				

4. Overall, how would you rate TCC with respect to providing the following types of education?

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No Opinion/ Not Observed
a. Occupational/Technical Training					
b. General Education (obtained in math, English, science, and social science courses)					

5. In general, your overall rating of the employee's job performance is: Excellent
Good
Average
Poor
Not Applicable/Not Observed

6. If appropriate positions came open, would you employ TCC graduates from this program?
Yes
No If no, why not? _____

7. How could the employee's educational preparation for employment be improved? Please respond on back.

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1998 Employer Survey Comments

146 – Emergency Medical Service

- Be closer to our job site.
- No experience in emergency medicine on arrival. Involve students in more actual emergency care situations prior to graduation.

156 – Nursing

- More office training.
- Improved critical thinking skills.
- Issues with blood transfusions/hazardous waste management foley catheter care.

166 – Medical Assistant

- Keeping them out in the practices during whole program, couple hours a week.

172 – Radiologic Tech.

- Feel that senior students should be working more independently especially on Portsmouth. Code now states a staff must be available.
- Some students don't apply themselves as well.

203 – Accounting

- Improved computer skills.

212 – Management

- Spelling – grammar layout adequate for present job. Could improve in advance problems. The instructor should use the time allotted to class instruction to teach the students the required study material. Example: National Electrical Code I & II I do not think Mr. _____ did a good job in preparing _____ for the journey man test. Most of his classes that should have had approximately 4 hours instruction covered 1 hour or less. I guess he expected the students to do a lot of self study. I think with this instructor, _____ was not prepared and I did not get my moneys worth. I took these same classes at ODU so I know somewhat about what it should involve.

213 – Business Administration

- He has a tendency of speaking as if still in the military.
- Concerning the job she did for me. I don't know how it could be improved.
- More thought out process before making rash decisions.

221 – Continuing Career Studies

- More challenging microcomputer training.
- TCC program courses should include real life example projects and not just book problems. Real life problems require additional thinking beyond book techniques and the use of common sense decision making. Concept courses should be taught and require minimum grade for advancement.
- There needs to be a program set up for training water works operators. There are several treatment plants in this area and this would be a benefit. A program needs to be arranged to help operators pass state certification. Also, these classes should be arranged (if possible) around scheduling at the treatment plants. I also think the number taking class should be reduced. At times it is very hard to put together a large number of operators for class and run a plant at the same time. Plants are run 24 hours.
- Limited technology knowledge.
- In case the command does have a RIF, this employee would need job related skills (i.e. real estate) to work for the contractor.
- Not prepared for simple technical tasks. More hands-on training. Emphasis on simple technical procedures.
- ____, has problem's with direction and problem solving at store level. _____, handles the tractor and trailer well. Directions are ____'s biggest problem.

234 – Computer Information Systems

- Need to offer more condensed courses. Should be able to get a certification in one or two semesters. Two years is too long and information is obsolete before the student can use it. I would recommend 3 or 4 one month courses every semester so that certification can be done quicker.
- Needs constant supervision; unable to resolve problems, unable to think logically in the execution of job duties and responsibilities. Program of study is not applicable to job duties and responsibility.

235 – Hotel Restaurant – Inst. Mgmt.

- Communication is a concern.

260 – Legal Assistant

- Spelling and grammar need improvement.

294 – Office Systems Technology

- This is an outstanding employee whose only deficiency is that in conversation she lapses into non-standard English. Because she does not do this in writing, I doubt that it will impede her career path, but is limits her in social situations. I wish someone had addressed this situation in her Business English curriculum.

- Improve/update software for AST programs and training for faculty.

335 – Horticulture

- Training relative to time management to the employed in handling multiple priorities on the job educational/learning component is excellent practical implementation in a timely manner may be a weakness when job duties consists of multiple priorities.

- Employee has a 4-year degree accounting. She has a military career. It is difficult to say how much help TCC had offered to _____ in areas like problem solving, math etc. She has a love of horticulture which compels her to work for less money than she would make as an accountant. TCC has helped her with information on plants and culture.

400 – Administrative Justice

- Program is police oriented – more general security courses would be ideal.

- Overall satisfied.

516 – Graphic Arts

- More program skills in Excel, Word and office marketing skills.

520 – Interior Design

- An internship program would benefit your Interior Design students with hands-on training.

522 – Interior Design

- Less "book" knowledge and more customer service preparation maybe customer – designer role playing would help.

648 – Liberal Arts

- Young associates do not always look at how a problem affects the big picture. I believe this is referred to as tunnel vision. I would suggest some type of leadership training. Most employers want people that can make a decision, whether it is right or wrong, identify problems and how the affect, not just that particular issue, but the overall running of the business and develop a plan of action. If an associate makes the wrong decision then I can fix it, train them, but at least they took the initiative and tried. One, idea would be to invite guest speakers, actual store managers, into the classroom to talk with and interact with students. Give them an idea what a manager looks for and most importantly WHY?? I bet you that most students do not really comprehend what it takes to run a large scale retail outlet on a day to day basis.

- Has problems solving problems on her own terms.

699 – General Studies

- Create assignments that require students to develop problem solving and creative approaches to their work.

- Ms. _____ lacked the self-confidence to act decisively when problem solving or thinking creatively. Her technical job related knowledge was equal to level of experience at graduation. At the time of this employee's enrollment in TCC's program there was a tremendous amount of change in the field and at TCC. Consequently a few students fell through the cracks. For whatever reasons, _____ felt inadequately prepared in some areas for an entry level position. Despite subsequent exposure to clinical situations she never developed the self-confidence required to fully excel.

- Employee needs more training in child development. This particular employee would benefit from more education/training in child development and developmentally appropriate practice.

- _____ is in a job which he has not been trained for. He is progressing but needs more improvement in technical abilities. Needs a more technical background.

706 – Electromechanical Maintenance/Mechanic

- Training needed in keeping work truck and shop area organized and clean. Training needed in inventory control. Parts should not run out.

713 – Occupational Technology

- The program administered by Tidewater Community College is an excellent tool for preparing an individual for competition in the occupational technology field. I believe on-site training opportunities would enhance training.

880 – Science / Computer Science

- Her particular area of study was not work-related but the general education courses help in any case, as well as, the computer training that she completed.
- Implement a program where on the job training can be used.
- Continue providing great teachers to your students.
- _____ has always applied the above categories prior to attending TCC (Not applicable). His job here is not applicable to his degree obtained by your school.

903 – Air Conditioning Refrigeration

- ____ is new to the trade and I am sure improvement will follow.

963 – Industrial Management

- Unskilled / uncomfortable addressing small groups. More training in management, "soft
- Employee is above average in all tasks. Looking to and working toward leadership role. No need for improvement.
- I have not encountered shortcomings in _____'s performance. However, I did not supervise him prior to college attendance and am not sure how the college has "improved" him.

Appendix C

1998 Employer Data by Curriculum

(Please contact the Institutional Research Office for this information.)

Appendix D

Employer Respondents by Campus and Curriculum

(Please contact the Institutional Research Office for this information.)